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SUBJECT: LISBON TREATY POLLS SEND MIXED MESSAGES, BUT EDGE STILL  
LIES WITH THE YEAS

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Summary  
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11. (SBU) The 'Yes' side in the Lisbon Treaty referendum campaign, scheduled for June 12, still appears to have an edge, despite gains by the 'No' side in recent polls. Political party leaders remain quietly confident that the 'Yes' vote will gather momentum in the final days of the campaign. Voter turnout continues to be regarded as the single most crucial factor on referendum day. We continue to agree with political analysts who say that when the time comes to cast their votes, the majority of Irish voters will opt for the advantages of continued close ties to Europe. End summary.

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The Polls  
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12. (U) According to the final tracking poll of the campaign, published on June 8 in the Irish Sunday Business Post, support for the Lisbon Treaty now lies at 42 percent among those entitled to vote, an increase of one point since the last Sunday Business Post poll published on May 25 (Ref C), while the 'No' vote totals 39 percent, an increase of 6 points. However, among voters who say they are absolutely certain to vote, 'Yes' leads by 46 to 37 percent, with 17 per cent still undecided. Polling analysts say that the increase in "No" votes is mostly among voters who are uncertain whether they will turn out. They note that support for the Treaty has increased markedly among Fine Gael and Labour Party members.

13. (U) At odds with the Sunday Business Post poll, the Irish Times released a poll on June 6 that had 'Yes' at 30 percent (down 5 points) and 'No' at 35 percent (up 17 points) since the last Irish Times poll three weeks previously.

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The Campaign  
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14. (U) In response to the negative Irish Times poll, the leaders of the three main political parties held a joint press conference on June 9 calling on the voters to put aside party differences and unite to protect Ireland's position within the European Union by voting 'Yes' in the Lisbon Treaty referendum. Taoiseach Brian Cowen was joined by opposition leaders Enda Kenny of Fine Gael and Eamon Gilmore of Labour. Calling on voters to do their "patriotic" duty, and stating, "There are issues where we stand together in the overall national interest and beyond partisan party politics," Cowen noted that the three parties represented 80 per cent of the electorate. Rejection of the Treaty, he said, would leave the European Union - and Ireland - facing an "uncertain future." He insisted that all of Ireland's concerns on issues such as taxation, neutrality, and workers rights were "copperfastened" in the Treaty.

15. (U) Kenny said that he was standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Cowen and Gilmore to "send out a strong, coherent message" to voters

that the Treaty was good for Ireland's future prosperity. He went on to decry what he called the "downright lies" being spread by anti-treaty campaigners, warning that claims that Ireland would face no consequences if it rejected Lisbon were "irresponsible and wrong." Gilmore urged his supporters to resist "taking a partisan view," and also criticized the "No" campaign positions, saying that none of their arguments "stood up to scrutiny." He went on to sound a note of warning, saying, "If the Treaty is rejected, we do not know what a different deal would yield for Ireland, or what our future in Europe would be."

¶16. (SBU) Over the weekend, the party leaders were out in full force, campaigning heavily for the Treaty across the country. A contact in the EU Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs told POLOFF on June 9 that party leaders are not disheartened by the polls. Rather, she said, the leaders are quietly confident the 'Yes' vote is gaining momentum.

¶17. (SBU) The 'No' campaign has been heartened by the poll results, which have been attributed, in part, to a constant refrain from the 'No' campaigners that a stronger EU will mean a weaker Ireland. The specters of EU taxation, conscription into an EU army, reduction of agricultural supports, and erosion of workers' rights have been effectively (if dishonestly according to 'Yes' leaders) portrayed by the 'No' campaign as the consequences of voting 'Yes.' There is also a view that some Irish are equating stronger links with the EU with stronger links to Ireland's former colonial ruler Great Britain, a connection that is anathema to some in Ireland.

¶18. (U) Political analysts of all stripes continue to stress that voter turnout remains the single most crucial factor in the referendum. A high turnout is expected to produce a positive outcome, while a low turnout is likely to doom the Treaty. Both sides are redoubling their efforts to turn out their supporters. Appeals to remaining undecided voters are reaching a crescendo.

¶19. (U) Though the referendum takes place on Thursday, June 12, under Irish law a media black-out goes into effect at midnight on Tuesday, June 10. There will be no press, radio, or television coverage of the referendum on Wednesday or on voting day. Nonetheless, individual campaigners are allowed to continue their efforts, right up until the closure of the polls at 10:00 PM the evening of June 12. Results of the vote will start to be known on Friday morning.

¶110. (U) Meanwhile, islanders on five islands off the Donegal coast will be the first to cast their votes in the referendum, with 745 people entitled to vote on June 9. Traditionally, the islanders have voted early in case bad weather delayed the ballot boxes from being brought back to the mainland by ship (notwithstanding the modern invention of helicopters). People living off the Mayo and Galway coasts will vote on June 11, while those on the Cork islands will vote with the rest of the county on June 12.

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Comment  
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¶111. (SBU) Although the findings of the recent polls are somewhat ambiguous, it's fair to say that the 'No' campaign seems to have picked up steam - a sudden surge that is somewhat inexplicable to seasoned political observers. Nonetheless, analysts point out that the polls in the final days of the May 2007 General Election indicated that support for Fianna Fail had fallen to a dangerously low level. Nonetheless, Fianna Fail won the election handily. The poll results have energized both sides in the final days of the campaign as contenders fight for the only poll that really matters - the poll on referendum day. We continue to agree with political analysts who say that when the time comes to cast their votes, the majority of Irish voters will opt for the advantages of continued close ties to Europe.

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